

COOL CRUISING

By Linda Coffman

Spring!



It's in the air and cruisers' fancies turn north. North to Alaska, with thoughts of majestic scenery, frontiers to explore, and WARM CLOTHING to pack. No tropical prints, sandals, or bikinis necessary. But that's all the stores are FULL of this time of year.

What's a cruiser to do? First you need to know how to dress and then where to find what you want.

Comfort

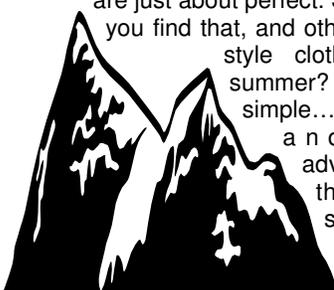


That's your first concern. The secret to being comfortable on an Alaska cruise is "layers" of light clothing in natural fabrics. Silk undergarments are the ultimate in warmth and luxury next to the skin. Top that with a cotton turtleneck or shirt and finish up with a sweater and wind breaker. Bottom wear can be jeans or docker-type pants. Warm socks and shoes that fit well and keep water and cold at bay are a must.

Summer weather in Alaska can be sunny and warm, overcast and chilly, or damp and dreary. It's changeable, depending on your itinerary and the month you're cruising in. Late May and September are naturally going to be cooler than June, July, and August. In May and June you'll see a lot more snow on the mountains. Later in the summer you may encounter some of the mosquitoes the state is famous for.

In late-May and early-June I found nylon "wind-suits" with a light cotton lining were ideal. They fit the bill for comfort (elastic waistbands!) and warmth. With a turtleneck and light sweater under the jackets and, if necessary, a pair of leggings under the pants, they were even warm enough for glacier viewing days.

One of my savviest cruising partners advises anorak-style jackets with a hood are just about perfect. So, where do you find that, and other outdoorsy



style clothing in the summer? Why, simple... plan ahead and take advantage of the spring sales of winter wear at the many

recreational and outdoor sporting wear stores.

Going Fishing?



In our rubbery yellow cocoons, we DID look like a couple of Maine lobster slayers. While pondering what to pack, I thought of the slickers we'd used so often on our boat in the Gulf of Mexico. They folded flat and barely took up room in the suitcase. Best of all, they cut the wind effectively and have hoods to ward off drizzling rain.

On our first day out of Vancouver, we were sitting at the pool bar of Norwegian Cruise Line's Windward. It was overcast, but not cold. Not at first. Our Jamaican bartender showed us his mini-thermometer which read about 50 degrees. Not useful in Jamaica, he snorted--the temperature didn't go high enough on it. Suddenly, the partly cloudy day took a cloudier and colder turn. Now the thermometer read 35 degrees and we switched from Salty Dogs to Jamaican Coffee with Tia Maria, rum, and warmth. The bright yellow slicker I slipped on provided an envelope against the chill and, while other less hardy souls scampered to indoor spaces, we continued to enjoy the scenery and company of our new Jamaican friend from outdoors.

I highly recommend a slicker or poncho if you have one.

Survival Gear



You'll be glad you brought extra film and a long lens for your camera. Figure on the amount of film you normally use, then double that. A panorama camera or lens is highly recommended. Binoculars (in the 7 X 50 lens range) or sport glasses are a necessity to bring seals, whales, and eagles into closer view. And you really don't want to have too close an encounter with a bear, do you? Better to have binoculars.

Outside, at a deck's rail, is where you'll want to be as your vessel slips silently into a passage and you suddenly encounter small icebergs and finally, the surprising blue tinted glacier. It can be an hours long experience and for that, a hat, or earmuffs, and gloves are a must-have.

Do you really need an umbrella? Do as I do, bring a folding one you can slip into your tote bag or purse. It's a given that if you have it, you won't need it, but if you don't... yes, it'll rain. Insect repellent? Bring it along, Alaska is famous for her state bird, the mosquito. You may or may not have a problem with them, depending on the timing of your cruise and the activities you choose ashore.

The air outside is chilly and the air inside your ship is heated. Combine those two elements and your skin and hair will suffer. Pack your most aggressive moisturizer, body lotion, and hair conditioner.

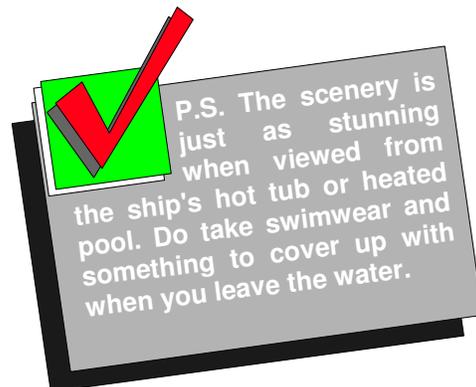
After Six



Alaska cruising is different than forays into the Caribbean. You'll find a more mature passenger mix and an earlier to bed crowd. Activities are likely to wind up shortly after the midnight buffet, if not before. You certainly want to appear stylishly attired, but the key word is comfort. Evening wear is more likely to be heavy on brocades and silks and light on strapless evening dresses for the ladies. Less is more... think pearls, not sequins. Men will be formal in their tuxes and a lot of navy-blue blazers will be sported at dinner, even on casual nights.

It's not all dress-up, of course. On NCL, our Alaska cruise included a Klondike Night when flannel shirts and jeans were appropriate and encouraged attire. Incidentally, our on-board native Alaskan guide was the only woman I saw in sleeveless dresses on formal nights.

Bon Voyage!



P.S. The scenery is just as stunning when viewed from the ship's hot tub or heated pool. Do take swimwear and something to cover up with when you leave the water.